

DENGEKI G's

VOLUME FIFTEEN!

15

NOVEL

乃木 若葉は 勇者 ある

企画原案・シリーズ構成：タカヒロ（みなどそふと）

執筆：朱白あおい

イラスト：BUNBUN

監修：Project 2H

ウルトラ怪獣 擬人化計画

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ガーリッシュ ナンバー

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キャラクター原案・カラーイラスト：QP:flapper

モノクロイラスト：堂本裕貴

MAISHA RECORD DEPARTMENT • MIHO-SAMA
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Hero Record [REDACTED]
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第十五話

病葉

乃木若葉は
勇者である

企画原案・シリーズ構成／

タカヒロ (みなとそふと)

執筆／朱白あおい

イラスト／BUNBUN

バーテックスデザイン／D.K&JWORKS

監修／Project 2H

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Vertex invasions became a common occurrence.

Although the large "perfect" Vertexes weren't included in the raids, the common and evolved level Vertexes were incessantly invading Shikoku.

Anzu and Tamako were no more.

Yuuna was hospitalized and could not participate in battle.

Meaning Wakaba and Chikage were the only heroes who could fight.

Though the invading swarms were not particularly overwhelming in size, the heroes would have a tough battle due to having only two members on their side.

"Eat shit...!"

The seven Chikages formed by Shichinin Misaki's power swung seven scythes at an evolved Vertex at the same time, shredding it into tiny pieces which vanished.

"Haah... haah..."

The physically exhausted Chikage was released of her trump card's power, and she returned to being a singular entity. She took a knee on the ground, her legs too fatigued to stand.

She looked up to see the Yoshitsune-imbued Wakaba cutting down the final remnants of the Vertexes.

"Phew..."

Wakaba sighed and landed right beside Chikage. She released her trump card and returned to her normal hero outfit.

"It's finally over, huh. How many does that make this month?"

"... I got tired of counting already..."

"There've been way too many invasions lately..."

Conspicuous injuries riddled the two girls' bodies. They had been grazed by evolved Vertex arrows and bruised by their blows.

Wakaba surveyed the entire Jukai.

"The corrosion happened again, huh..."

Part of the Jukai had become discolored and decayed-looking. Lately, the invading Vertexes have had the power to corrode the Jukai despite not being perfect Vertexes. The heroes had to hasten their battle in order to minimize the damage to the Jukai, but with only two of them, the battles would drag on nonetheless. The longer the battles went on, the more the Jukai corroded. And corrosion to the Jukai meant putting the citizens of Shikoku in harm's way.

"The Jukai corrosion isn't the only problem..."

Chikage looked towards the Seto Inland Sea barrier.

Beyond that barrier, a Vertex was forming. A Vertex stronger than the scorpion-type one that killed Anzu and Tamako. Neither the Taisha nor the Heroes had been able to come up with a way to defeat that giant Vertex.

Thanks to Tamako and Anzu's deaths and the appearance of an unbeatable enemy, Chikage had thought a lot about death lately. She could very well join them one day. It wasn't any stretch of the imagination.

(Just what... am I fighting for...?)

In the back of her head, she replayed the anti-hero criticism that had been spreading through the population.

You're useless. Worthless. Unnecessary. Disappear. Nobody cares if you're gone. Stop kidding yourself. You're incompetent. Weak as hell. Did you even try? How did you lose? You're useless. Worthless.

(I'm putting my life in mortal danger... whittling away my body with fairy power... and for what...?)

After forestization lifted, Wakaba and Chikage were examined at the hospital as usual.

Hinata escorted them there and stayed in the waiting room until they were done. With the rising rate of Vertex invasions, spending time in the waiting room had become a near daily activity for her, but each visit as bitter as the last. What truly frustrated Hinata was her powerlessness and inability to help the heroes.

Hinata tried to distract herself with a newspaper that was left in the waiting room. In it were articles about the disasters caused by Jukai corrosion and the Taisha's search for a counter plan.

The repeated corrosion of the Jukai.

The resulting accidents and disasters.

The deaths of Tamako and Anzu had leaked to the general public.



The Taisha concluded that suppressing the information was impossible and officially announced the hero deaths and the link between the frequent calamities and Vertex attacks. Thanks to the Taisha's information control, the newspapers and TV news reported with a positive slant the heroes' victories and the Taisha's activities.

However-- voices of anxiety cried up throughout the population. Crime and suicides rose. Public order was collapsing.

"Sorry for the wait, Hinata."

Done with her examinations, Wakaba walked into the waiting room.

"Not at all. I'm the one who chose to wait here on my own."

Hinata quickly returned the newspaper she was reading to the magazine rack, but not before Wakaba noticed the article she was reading.

"Hmm... more victims, huh..."

An unpleasant expression arose on Wakaba's face.

"It's not your fault, Wakaba-chan... In fact, it's thanks to you two that more people didn't get hurt."

Hinata tried using gentle words of encouragement, but Wakaba didn't cheer up.

"The doctor said... I'm using trump cards too much. It's apparently taking a toll on my body. But I have to use trump cards if I want to keep the corrosion down to a minimum..."

Wakaba sat down on the waiting room sofa and sighed.

"It's a war of attrition, I guess... We're at an impasse here."

"... True..."

The damage to the citizens must be minimized.

But if the heroes continued to use trump cards, they would be the first to fall.

A short moment later, Chikage returned to the waiting room.

"Is your body okay?"

Hinata looked at Chikage's face with concern.

"It's far from okay... Besides, they said to hold back on using trump cards..."

"You too, huh?"

Wakaba furrowed her eyebrows.

"Those guys... just don't understand... Just what do they think we've been wearing away at our bodies for? Don't they get we're just trying to minimize damage...?"

Chikage cast her eyes down as she rambled in frustration.

"In that case, fine, I'll just stop using trump cards... And then we'll see how many victims turn up. That'll teach them... Shikoku the Taisha alike... They talk big for cowards in their safe places...! What the hell do they even--"

"Chikage, that's enough."

Wakaba interrupted. For she had noticed the sad look on Hinata's face. Hinata knew her role put her in a safe place in society and felt guilty about it. The phrase "cowards in their safe places" just rubbed salt into the wound.

However, Hinata gently held Chikage's hand.

"It's okay. Please let it all out. All your sadness. All your frustration... I'll listen to it all if it'll help you get it all off your chest..."

Chikage fell silent.

After a pregnant pause, she violently shook off Hinata's hand.

"... Leave me alone... A miko like you... has got nothing to do with me..."

And with that, Chikage headed to the hospital exit.

"Hold it, Chikage! There's no need to talk like that, is there!?"

Wakaba placed her hand on Chikage's shoulder, stopping her.

"I know you're frustrated in this situation. Of course you are! But that's no excuse to hurt someone else like that! It's difficult times like these that we really do need solidarity--"

"What a logical statement. Everything's 'logical' about you, isn't it...?"

"What?"

"You can't live on cold logic alone... Not without a thick skin... But me? I'm not as strong as you... I'm not thick skinned like you...! You have no idea what it feels like to be weak like me...!"

"... Now's not the time to whine!"

"Shut up!"



Chikage pushed Wakaba away. The sudden motion took Wakaba by surprise as she fell onto the floor alongside a nearby decorative plant. A shattered shard of the flowerpot pierced the skin of Wakaba's hand, causing red drops to scatter on the floor.

"Gh...!"

Hinata rushed over to Wakaba as she winced in pain.

"Wakaba-chan!"

"Ah..."

The sight of Wakaba's injury caused Chikage's face to tremble. She had only pushed Wakaba away impulsively and didn't mean to hurt her.

Chikage ran out of the hospital as if to run away.

"Wait, Chikage! You--"

Wakaba tried to chase after her, but was stopped by Hinata.

"You need to treat your hand first!"

"..."

Wakaba had no choice but to listen to Hinata and stop.

Chikage rushed back from the hospital to her dorm room.

"Haah, haah..."

She locked the door and plopped onto her bed.

"Takashima-san... Takashima-san, Takashima-san, Takashima-san... I need to see you..."

Yuuna was still not allowed visitors, so Chikage could not see her.

The visitor ban had been longer than the last time Yuuna had used Shuten-Doji. Perhaps it was due to her pushing herself before she had fully healed.

Without a pillar of support, Chikage's thoughts headed for a dark, gloomy direction.

"Ugghh... It's not my fault... It's not my fault... Even what happened in the hospital... That was because Nogi-san had to talk to me like that...!"

She didn't hurt Wakaba on purpose. She just pushed Wakaba away to try and get away from her. She didn't think it was enough to push her down. It was just a misfortunate coincidence that there happened to be a flowerpot there that happened to shatter and happened to pierce Wakaba's hand.

"That's right... it was just bad luck...!"

'--Yeah, that's for sure. You're totally right--'

Chikage suddenly heard a voice by her ear. She looked up in surprise.

Before she had even noticed, someone was there, right next to her bed-- Someone who looked exactly like Chikage herself.

(Ahh, I see, this is a dream... Just a bad dream...)

The girl with Chikage's form curled her lips into the shape of a crescent moon, forming a fake smile.

'--Besides, doesn't it seem a little forced how Nogi-san got injured? You expect me to believe that the strong Wakaba-san just happened to fall down that easily, and there happened to be a well-placed flowerpot there too?--'

"What are you... implying...?"

Even though she knew it was a dream, Chikage couldn't help but ask the girl who looked like her.

'--What if it was on purpose?--'

"..."

'--I'm saying Nogi-san threw herself down and hurt herself in a theatrical manner to make you out to be the bad guy.--'

"... For what purpose...?"

'--Isn't it obvious? It's so she can attack you later and claim it was under the name of justice. She's just like those jerks who hurt you in the past.--'

Chikage recalled the memories of when she had been bullied in the past.

The girl with Chikage's face whispered into her ear.

'--Nogi-san is your enemy.--'

"..."

'--Your enemy--'

Just then, Chikage's mail ringtone sounded out from her smartphone.

Chikage snapped to her senses, got up from her bed, and looked around. The girl with her face was nowhere to be found.



The curtains of the night had closed outside her window before she had realized it. Hours had already passed since she had returned. Chikage really must have fallen asleep without noticing it. That conversation really must have been a dream.

She picked her smartphone up from the table. It was mail from the Taisha.

She was going to ignore it if it were another request for her to take counseling, but that wasn't it. It was a very abrupt message.

--The Taisha hereby extends a proposal. Would you like for your parents to be moved to Marugame City so that they may live with you?

After getting her hand injury treated, Wakaba returned to her room. She puzzled over her feelings as she looked at her bandaged hand.

(I was going to chase after Chikage when she ran out of the hospital... but what exactly was I going to do once I caught up to her...?)

Wakaba had been horribly worked up when it had all happened. The blood had clearly rushed to her head when she saw Chikage's abusive attitude towards Hinata. But even with that considered, she had still acted with less composure than she usually would have.

(If Hinata hadn't stopped me, I might have ended up hurting Chikage...)

That thought sent chills down Wakaba's spine.

She realized a little bit late that even though she had gotten into an argument with Chikage, she should have said things differently. After all, she had known beforehand that Chikage was in a mentally dangerous state.

(Have I... been driven into a corner too...?)

She felt as if she were losing control of her emotions. Not a good sign.

Early in the morning, several days later, Chikage headed to her hometown to help them prepare to move to Marugame City.

She sat in her seat in the express train, passing the time away with her handheld game system. But she just couldn't get into her usual mood. She couldn't concentrate, and she kept making several misplays.

She turned off her game system and closed her eyes.

As a minor, it would only be natural for Chikage to live with her parents, and it would help her developmentally in physical and emotional health... or so the Taisha said. But basically, that meant that they wanted to build a foundation of support for her. Even Chikage could imagine why.

'--The Taisha don't want to loose their precious tool, that's all. They're just using you. No Taisha member, no adult is on your side.--'

It was the voice she heard in her dream. The voice of the girl who had her face.

She had started to hear that voice again and again after that day. Even though she was just a character in Chikage's dream, she had started talking in reality.

(Shut up... Shut up...)

Or was this even reality? Was the dream continuing into reality? Was the girl who had her form reality? Was this a dream?

She couldn't think straight.

The day Chikage left for her hometown, a flustered Hinata visited Wakaba's room.

"Wakaba-chan! I just got contacted by the Taisha...!"

"What happened?"

"They've figured something about about the trump card's effects..."

Hinata was rarely ever as flustered as she was when she explained to Wakaba what the Taisha had told her.

As a result of their examinations of Wakaba, Chikage, as well as Yuuna, the Taisha had uncovered a new truth about the effects of imbuing the human body with fairies. There were both physical and supernatural effects.

For the physical effect, the use of strength beyond the limits of the human body caused damage and destruction to the muscles, bones, and internal organs. This physical effect had already been known. The new discovery was the supernatural effect.

"To imbue the human body with fairies-- is to come in contact with the inhuman. When that happens, the human body accumulates a 'bad something'. In olden days, words like miasma or impurity were used to describe it."

Since many Taisha members were part of the Shinto priesthood, imbuing the body with the inhuman had been rumored to be dangerous. But it is impossible to quantify miasma or impurity, and thus, the danger was not taken as seriously as the physical burden placed on the body.

"But thanks to Anzu-san, the Taisha began to shift their attention to it."

"Because of Anzu?"

"Yes. For a long time, Anzu-san had been observing the other heroes and keeping a note of the effects and dangers of their use of fairies in a notebook. When the Taisha saw that notebook, they began a serious investigation into the supernatural effects..."



Anzu's notebook was found when Hinata was sorting through the belongings of the deceased heroes. It was the only handwritten notebook found amongst the massive stockpiles of books that filled her shelves.

"Now that you mention it, even in her final battle, Anzu said it was dangerous to use trump cards..."

Out of all the heroes, Anzu had been the one who most strongly felt the danger of the fairies.

Furthermore, when the first perfect Vertex appeared, Yuuna imbued her body with the fierce fairy known as Shuten-Doji. The effects of the "bad something" had an obvious effect on Yuuna, apparently confirming the Taisha's suspicions of the dangers of fairies.

"So... what exactly is that effect?"

"Increased anxiety, paranoia, and aggression. Loss of self control. Fixation on negative and destructive thoughts... The report used many difficult words, but essentially, the mind becomes unstable and the person becomes more prone to reckless behavior."

"... I... see..."

Wakaba's destabilizing emotions and increased irritability were perhaps an effect of the repeated use of fairy power.

Chikage's emotional danger was perhaps caused in part by fairies too, and not simply the anxiety caused by the desperate situation.

Just then, Wakaba's smartphone rang. The screen indicated the caller was using a pay phone. Though it seemed suspicious, Wakaba picked up.

'--Hello, Wakaba-chan?--'

On the other end of the phone was Yuuna, whispering.

"Yuuna? What happened?"

'--Umm, well, I'm in the hospital, but I'm worried about you and Gun-chan... but I can't get out! And because of the whole fairy thing, Gun-chan won't pick up....--'

"Yuuna, calm down. Just what are you talking about?"

'--Aaahh, sorry! Umm, but we need to hurry, or the phone won't connect!--'

Yuuna's roundabout words confused Wakaba and then--

"Wakaba-chan, please leave it to me."

Hinata took the phone from Wakaba.

"Yuuna-san, please take a deep breath. Okay. You're calling from the hospital phone, right? ...Yes, I heard. Okay, so that's why you called. ... Yes, I see. I think Wakaba-chan's fine. ... Yes. ... I see..."

After talking a little bit on the phone, Hinata related what she heard from Yuuna to Wakaba.

"It seems like Yuuna-san heard about the fairy effect at the hospital too. Part of why she's not allowed visitors is out of concerns of emotional instability."

"So that was it...?"

Even the bright and positive Yuuna was subject to effects that hindered her from seeing people-- The trump card's supernatural effects were not looking good.

"So it looks like Yuuna-san tried calling you and Chikage-san out of worry."

"I'm fine... for now, at least."

"Yes, I told her that. Yuuna-san's worried about Chikage, though... Apparently, she tried calling her multiple times, but she won't pick up..."

"...!"

Wakaba took her smartphone back from Hinata and spoke with Yuuna again.

"Nogi speaking. Chikage is currently heading back to her family's home in Kochi."

'--Really? Then maybe she can't pick up because she's on the train...--'

"No, she should have already gotten home long ago..."

Chikage was in an unstable mental state. She wasn't picking up.

Wakaba had a bad feeling about this.

'--There are people watching throughout the hospital at all times! I can't slip out! I don't have my smartphone either! Ah! The nurse is coming...!--'

Wakaba could hear people talking on the other side of the phone.

Apparently Yuuna had slipped through hospital surveillance to make a phone call.

"Listen, Yuuna. Don't even think about slipping out of the hospital to look for Chikage! You're seriously injured too, you know!"

'--But... Gun-chan's...--'

"I'll go. I'll head towards Chikage's place and make sure she's okay."



'--Wakaba-chan... if... anything happens, save Gun-chan. Please.--'

Yuuna pleaded.

"Leave it to me. I'm the leader, remember?"

Wakaba hung up and immediately activated the app to transform into her hero form.

"I'm heading to Chikage's place. Take care of Yuuna for me."

And with that, Hinata understood everything.

"Understood."

Wakaba opened the window and leapt outside.

She left the Marugame Castle Grounds and headed to Kochi Prefecture using tall buildings as footholds.

(Chikage just didn't realize her phone was going off... I hope... Chikage, please...!)

Chikage had arrived at her hometown's bus stop a little bit before Wakaba had left Marugame City--

But before going home, Chikage decided to take a little look around town first.

Now that her mother and father were moving to Marugame City, Chikage would likely never visit this town again. So she wanted to take one last look.

She carried her scythe in a cloth bag and walked alongside the paddy fields of young rice plants. Chikage recalled the time she came back last year.

The voices praising her as a hero. The voices acknowledging her worth. The voices that loved her.

That was what Chikage needed now.

(I'm sure... the townspeople acknowledge my worth and love me... After all, they said they were proud of me as a hero... So I'm sure...)

It was an underpopulated rural town, but Chikage deliberately chose to walk on roads where she thought she would run across people.

She was sure that if she came across any townspeople that they would approach her and call out to her like last time--

She spotted a man working the rice paddies. He noticed Chikage and turned to face her, but he did not approach her. He simply looked away and continued working the farm.

(... He's working, so it's not like he's got a choice...)

Chikage agreed with her assessment and continued walking.

Next, she saw two women around the same age as her mother walking along the other side of the street. When they noticed Chikage, they looked at her in surprise.

"Ah, Chikage--- sama. You're back?"

"Yes... I have a little business here..."

"Oh, is that so?"

And with just those few words, they slipped past Chikage and left.

(... huh?)

That was a completely different reaction from what Chikage was expecting. There was no admiration, no reverence in their voices. Just cold, distant formalities.

(Why...?)

After a bit of confusion, Chikage doubled back and tailed the women.

Once she caught sight of them again, she overheard their conversation.

"That girl's back, huh."

"She's got some guts to walk around calmly like that... especially when it's those girls' fault that people are dying."

(... huh?)

Chikage couldn't believe her ears.

(It's my fault... that people are dying...?)

The women kept talking while walking, most likely not realizing Chikage was following them. "Since the heroes can't defeat those monsters, we've been getting injuries and casualties all over, haven't we?"

"Are they even fighting properly...?"

"Who knows... Not like they tell us anything about what they're doing and where."

"Why was that girl even chosen...? Not like her parents are worth anything..."

Chikage firmly grasped her scythe and stood still.



'--Ah, how cold of them. How damn cold of them. First it's 'Oh great hero' this and 'Oh great hero' that, and now they've turned their backs on you.--'

She heard the voice again.

(Shut up... Shut up...)

'--Nobody's on your side. Remember your childhood. Everyone is your enemy. Everyone hurt you.--'

(Shut up...!)

Chikage ran home along low-traffic paths. Along the way, her smartphone rang several times, but she was too frustrated to even look at her phone, much less pick up.

Finally, she reached her old one-story home.

In the living room was her mother on a futon and her father beside her. Her mother had been hospitalized with Uranophobia, but ever since they were set to move, she had come back home with her father.

"Chikage, you're back?"

His daughter had returned for the first time in ages, but there was not an atom of joy to be found on his face. He looked at Chikage with a blank, worn-out face.

"Your mother's on sleep medication right now... She sleeps half a day lately. It'd be bad if she went on a rampage if you woke her up, so it's best to just let her sleep."

Chikage silently listened to her father's disinterested voice. Her mother's Uranophobia had progressed to the point where she couldn't live a day-to-day life off medication.

Abruptly, and expressionlessly, her father muttered.

"Hey, Chikage... Tell me you're joking."

"Huh... about what?"

"The three of us, living together? That's impossible, you know? Just look at your mother. Does it LOOK like she's ready for a family life!? She's best off in a hospital... so why should we live together? Why now, after all this time...?"

"That's... what the Taisha decided..."

"Bullshit! Well, moving to Kagawa would be great, though. Anything to get out of this town. This shithole! The sooner we get out, the better!!"

Chikage's father shouted out in frustration.

"Just what happened here...?"

"Watch this!!"

Chikage's father picked up a bundle of paper off the table and threw it at her.

Dozens of papers, each of different materials and dimensions, scattered onto the floor. Scraps of notebook paper, stationery, backs of leaflets, copy paper-- each of them scrawled with abusive language. "Heroes are useless" "Trash breeds trash" "Village idiots" "Don't you know how to raise a daughter?" "Die" "No point in a hero who can't save shit" "Your whole family is trash"

"What... is this...?"

Chikage's voice trembled. Her eyes grew dark. Her legs quivered.

"Each and every day, these letters come pouring into the house! And it's not just letters, oh no, everyone's shit talking us behind our backs! I get dirty looks all day just walking through town.

Some aren't even ashamed to tell me directly...! Ah, I've just about had it with this town! And it's all your damn fault, Chikage! You lost! Some hero you are! You can't even protect anyone! You piece of shit!"

"..."

The Koori family had been hated throughout town from the start. But they had gained respect from the townspeople thanks to Chikage becoming a hero.

And yet--

'--This is what heroes get for all their hard battles.--'

The voice echoed in her head again.

And then, hidden among all the abusive letters-- she found words she absolutely could not believe: "Doi and Iyojima are incompetent fools. Give us back our tax money. Heroes are worthless!"

"... The hell is that?"

Did Tamako and Anzu fight just to be told that?

They dedicated their lives and in the end, paid the ultimate sacrifice--

"And this... is how you bastards repay them....?"

'--That's bullshit--'

"We're not worthless trash--"

'--YOU are!--'



Chikage grabbed her scythe and sprang out of the house.

After leaving her house, Chikage unsheathed her scythe and walked down the road.

'--you're living off the sacrifice of heroes you're parasites living off our work and yet when the peace we earned for you starts going awry you betray us unforgivable unforgivable unforgivable why won't you praise me why won't you respect me why won't you acknowledge my worth why won't you love me if you won't acknowledge my worth if you won't love me-----Then I'll kill you)

Chikage understood now.

There wasn't ever a girl who had her face.

There wasn't ever a voice echoing inside her head.

(This is my mind's true voice...!)

Further down the road were four girls chatting as they walked. Chikage recognized them. They were the girls who bullied her in elementary school.

They noticed Chikage and stopped in their tracks, wide-eyed. If the sight of a drawn scythe with a blade as long as a man is tall wasn't enough to strike fear in them, Chikage's cold, disgusted eyes were.

"Huh-- wha-- K-Koori--- san?"

"A scythe...? Wh-what's with that...? Huh? Huh?"

The girls stood frozen in place out of confusion.

But one of them spoke up with feigned confidence to hide her fear.

"Wh-what are you even thinking...!? You can't just walk around with an open blade like that! You think you can get away with anything just because you're a hero!? Are you stupid!? Get real!"

Chikage silently listened as the girl disparaged her.

The other three girls joined in, as if inspired by their friend's show of bravado.

"You heroes aren't some special privileged class! You're just worthless!"

"Go away and try fighting those monsters for once! I guess becoming a hero didn't cure you of being a retard!"

"When you heroes fail, it makes victims out of us normal people!"

Without so much of a twitch in her face,

Chikage slowly raised her scythe,
and casually swung it down.

As if she were swatting a fly with a newspaper.

The girl closest to her had her clothes slashed from her chest to her stomach, a thin line of blood rising up to the surface of her skin.

"...eep, Noooooooooo!"

It was not a serious injury at all, but she was shocked by the sight of blood and fell to her knees.

"Eeep...!"

One of the girls turned around and tried to escape. But the first prey to run is the first prey to be targeted.

Chikage wrapped around to where the girl was running to and tripped her with the scythe's pole end.

"Gyah!"

The girl tumbled and fell to the ground.

"P-p-please... please... please spare me...!"

The girl begged Chikage with a tear-soaked face.

Chikage gave the girl a cold glance before taking out her smartphone and activating the hero app. Her clothes transformed into her battle garb.

She then looked at the girl once more.

"Wh-what... S-spare me...! P-please, spare me..."

Chikage raised her scythe.

"Come on and fight..."

"Huh...?"

Before the girl could understand the meaning of what was said to her, Chikage sliced her cheek.

A line of blood flowed.

"Hyah, eeeeeep!"

As the girl desperately held down her cheek and screamed, Chikage spoke to her expressionlessly.

"Doi-san and Iyojima-san... both stood up against fierce monsters despite hopeless odds... even when it cost them their lives... If you think you have any right to criticize us... then why don't you try fighting something overwhelmingly stronger than yourselves for once...!?"



Chikage swung down her scythe.

A red line ran down the girl's thigh.

"Hyaaaaaah!"

"Come on and fight...!"

Chikage swung down her scythe. Several strands of the girl's hair fell.

"... Fight...! Maybe then you'll understand our pain...!"

With each swing, Chikage wounded the girl's body little by little. The girl screamed like mad. But Chikage did not stop.

Chikage was intoxicated by the sensation of giving into her anger.

She felt her own mind slowly collapse.

The other three girls were either standing in place in fear or had fallen to the ground entirely. Chikage then went for the fatal blow--

And heard the sound of metal striking metal.

Chikage's scythe had been stopped by Wakaba's sword.

"Chikage, stop!"

"Nogi... san...?"

Why was she here?

Why did she stop her?

Several questions rose up in Chikage's head, but she was in no condition to think calmly.

"Don't get in my way...!"

Chikage strengthened her grip around her scythe.

But Wakaba didn't budge either. She pushed back against the scythe with her sword. Chikage lost the power struggle and retreated several steps.

Calm down, Chikage! You're no position to think straight!"

"I know, I know...! But they betrayed us...! We've risked our lives to protect these people... and they betrayed us! ... How do you expect me to calm down...!?"

Chikage remained infuriated as she swung her scythe.

Wakaba blocked Chikage's attacks with her sword.

"No! That rage isn't how you truly feel! You're under the influence of the fairy's power!"

"What... are you talking about...!"

She had no idea what Wakaba was saying.

Chikage could feel nothing but rage towards the selfish humans who abused the very heroes who protected them.

Chikage tried to finish passing her judgment, but Wakaba would not budge. She was strong. Strong enough to defend against all of Chikage's attacks.

"Stop already!"

"Shut... up...!"

"If you harm people, you won't be able to turn back!"

"Zip it...! Shut up! Stop talking!"

Chikage kept swinging her scythe enraged.

"They're all full of shit! Every last one...! What have we been fighting for...!? Tell me, what!? We protect them...! We protected these ungrateful bastards...! We put our lives on the line for them...! So why must they criticize us...!? If this is what it all comes down to... then there's no point in fighting, no point in protecting people...! None at all!"

"Even so, we still must protect them! We must protect those who can't protect themselves...!"

"Shut up...! Nothing's changed from back then! Nothing at all...! I became a hero...! And I still get hurt! I still get criticized...! Why, why, why!?"

"Chikage..."

"Why...!? Tell me why...! Ugh, uuughh....!"

Tears fell from Chikage's face as she swung her scythe.

"Why... why won't you fight back...!? You're way stronger than me if you even tried...!"

"How do you expect me to attack you...!?"

Wakaba would only block Chikage's scythe with her sword. She never struck back.

She was still regretting the quarrel she had with Chikage at the hospital. Though fairy influence may have caused instability in her mind, she still ended up hurting her friend.

"I have no more swords to point towards a friend!"

"You... truly... disgust me...!"

Chikage hated Wakaba.



Wakaba was always right, always strong, and always confident. She was the center of attention--

Chikage was jealous of her righteousness, her strength, her confidence, and her popularity.

So in the end, Chikage admired Wakaba.

The personification of all Chikage ever wanted to be had a name, and that name was Nogi Wakaba.

And that's what disgusted Chikage.

That's what irritated her about Wakaba.

Chikage continued to swing her scythe down at Wakaba.

"Chikage, don't lose sight of yourself...!"

"... Shut up...!"

"Yuuna told me... to save you."

"...!!!"

"Nobody's worried about you more than Yuuna is... So I have to stop you. For your sake and for Yuuna's!"

The moment she heard Yuuna's name, Chikage stopped attacking.

And the moment she stopped attacking, Chikage noticed the situation around her.

Dozens of townspeople had gathered around Chikage and Wakaba, perhaps having heard the commotion.

They looked at Chikage in fear, in disgust, and in anger.

Countless eyes tormented Chikage.

A cage of eyes.

"Stop it... stop it... Don't look at me like that..."

Chikage's feet caved. She could hardly stand. Her scythe slipped out of her hands. She fell to her knees, put her hands to her head, and sobbed.

"Don't hate me... please... I'm begging you... please love me..."

All that was left was a girl crying like a child in a tear-soaked hero outfit.

And finally, Koori Chikage was brought back to Marugame City--

To be suspended and her hero system revoked.

(Chapter 15 End)